

Spy Shop

PARIS. On a recent afternoon, a foreign diplomat in Paris decided to go shopping. He went about it in a very unusual way. First, he gave his chauffeur a couple of hours off. Then he got into the car himself and zigzagged his way through the Paris streets, to throw off anyone who might be following him. Strangest of all, instead of driving toward the Rue de Rivoli, Champs Elysees or a similarly elegant shopping area, he headed for one of the shabbiest quarters of Paris, the Place de la Bastille.

When he got to his destination he parked his car in the street, looked around, and then ducked into a dingy alley called the passage Thiéré. Halfway down the passageway he paused, took a final glance over his shoulder, and then stepped into the only clean-looking, white-fronted building on the block.

It was a curious way for a diplomat to go shopping, but then, our man wasn't only a diplomat. He was also a spy. And the establishment he visited caters to espionage specialists, intelligence officers, secret agents, undercover men, gumshoe artists and private eyes. It supplies them with the tools of their trade, and although its proprietor, courtly, handsome, pipe-smoking Eric Epars, doesn't call it a "spy shop," that's what it is.

In fact, says Mr. Epars, it's the only shop of its kind in the world. He decided to go into the business last April when he read an article that said there were 400,000 practicing spies in the world, and of these 40,000 were based in Paris.

"The psychological climate of France is favorable to spying," he says genially. "About 80 percent of my clients come from various governments. But private industry is a growing customer. Since American firms have been expanding in

France a tremendous boom has taken place in industrial spying. I estimate that \$4 million a year is lost by spies stealing industrial secrets, such as information about prospective mergers. And of course we also deal with private detective agencies and individuals with problems, such as jealous husbands and wives."

Epars' shop doesn't handle cloaks, daggers, face-masks, shoe-telephones, invisible ink, edible paper or any of the legendary trappings of espionage agents. It deals strictly in electronic hardware of the most sophisticated type—the kind of equipment which, in the hands of an expert, can relay information from such private, intimate locales as an embassy conference chamber, a business board room, or even a fashionable boudoir.

Bugs on display

Some of the devices Epars talks about most fondly still are in the future, such as a laser-beam microphone that will enable a television watcher to pick up the conversation of any individual in a crowded stadium, or a fingernail-sized transmitter that can transmit sound thousands of yards.

But even now, the Swiss-born Epars offers quite an array of equipment, all of it displayed in businesslike fashion on shelves or in glass showcases. His products consist largely of electronic eavesdropping or "bugging" devices that can



Spy supply entrepreneur Eric Epars near entranceway to passage leading to shop.



Girl spy wears a tape recorder under her bra. Here she talks to her unsuspecting victim.

latch onto a telephone, a clock, a radio, a lamp or simply be buried in a wall or concealed in the clothing. With the pride of a man who stands behind his products, Mr. Epars says that conversations can be "bugged" in homes, offices, cafes, automobiles, and even in the street. "In this day and age," he says soberly, "you've got to look for infra-red, ultra-violet, sonics, subsonics, supersonics, audio radio frequencies and single sideband transmission."

Of course, much of the equipment Epars handles is available elsewhere, and most of it is American-made. But what makes his operation distinctive is the way he has put the implements of spying on a systematic basis under one roof. One of his most popular items, which he considers a bargain at \$2500, is a "complete spy kit" consisting of a receiver, a 16-hour tape recorder, and a "bug-detector" with searching antenna all contained in a handsome medium-sized attache kit any spy would be proud to be seen with. But the item he takes most pride in is an "infinity transmitter," which enables an eavesdropper to dial a phone number and then listen to whatever is being said in the room at the other end—without the phone ringing or the victim being

aware that his line is tapped.

Epars realizes that spying has grown technologically complicated far beyond the primitive methods employed by Mata Hari and other old-fashioned spies. So he operates a "school" where a two-week course is given by himself and his technicians in the proper use of the devices. There's no charge for customers who order a minimum of \$40,000 worth of equipment; others pay \$500.

Money no object

Like a doctor, Epars doesn't advertise his business, but one spy tells another, and customers keep coming. He also sells wood-working machinery, not as a "front" for his other activities, but because it, too, is a profitable line, and you never know when a recession may hit the spy business.

All in all though, Epars is confident that spying, whatever temporary setbacks it may receive, is never going to go completely out of style.

"Money is no object to the really big spenders among government spies," he says. "Of course, this business has its risks. You have to get paid quickly, and in dollars. I recently had a very bad experience. We had a million-dollar order from a certain government—I can't mention names, but if you read the papers, you know whom I mean—but before the deal was complete, the government was overthrown and the ruler fled. Now we hope we can sell the same stuff to the new regime, so it shouldn't be a total loss. Of course, it's a lesson in the advantages of fast delivery. If the former regime had come to us earlier, maybe now they wouldn't be the former regime."